

Florida National Scenic Trail Coalition

Summary of June 9th Coalition Meeting held in Tallahassee, FL



Mission of Coalition

The USFS and its partners work to complete, protect, maintain, and promote the FNST as a distinct Florida recreational asset and to ensure an optimum, nationally significant recreation experience.

Participants

Robert Mindick, Osceola County
John Waldron, FL Outdoor Recreation Council
Bob DeGross, Big Cypress National Park
Nels Parson, St. Johns River Water Management District
Taylor Stein, University of Florida
Carlos Schomaker, FL Trail Association
Doug Alderson, Office of Greenways and Trails
James Burnett, US Fish and Wildlife Service
Jerrie Linsey, FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Dale Allen, FL Greenways & Trails Foundation
Susan Matthews, US Forest Service
Shelli Bischoff, Conservation Impact, Facilitator

Guests

Brian Ruscher, OGT
Jim Wood, FDOT
Caitlin Murphy, US Forest Service
Maya Buhler, US Forest Service
Teresa Gallagher, US Forest Service
Megan Eno, US Forest Service
Megan Donoghue, FTA
Eric Mason, FTA
Helen Wigersma, FTA
Angela Colonna, UF
Ramesh Paudyal, UF
Carolyn Huntley, UF
Linda Patton, FTA
Howard Pardue, FTA
Melanie Knapp, FTA

Next Meeting

Monday, December 8, 2014

Summary

The June 9th, 2014 Florida National Scenic Trail Coalition meeting of land managers and partners was utilized as a “mid-plan” review of the FNST 5-Year Strategic Plan. The meeting format, which will carry in to future meetings, was organized around the 4 Goals of the Strategic Plan providing a status update from the Forest Service, a presentation from a partner on innovative actions working towards each goal, and a review of the 2014 work plan. This document is meant to act as a summary of presentation and discussion items. For additional meeting materials, including presentations, visit www.fs.usda.gov/fnst .

Goal 3: Partnerships – Projects and Funding

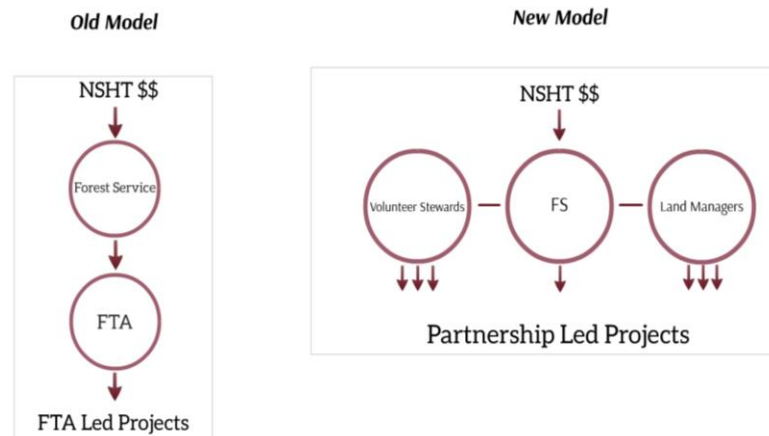
The development of the FNST Coalition and the 5 Year Strategic plan marked a turning point in the development of a new partnership model for the FNST designed to engage all partners on the Trail in a meaningful and coordinated way. In time it has proven necessary to reimagine our funding distribution model to better suit our new partnership structure. The US Forest Service presented a new funding distribution model and budget allocation.

FNST New Budget Breakdown



Historically, National Scenic Historic Trail (NSHT) dollars were designated to the Forest Service, and then designated to the FTA for FTA led projects. In the past, this was the best model for getting money and projects on the ground but placed the burden of coordination with partners on the FTA as well. The new coalition model engages everyone on the same level: NSHT dollars are designated almost equally to volunteer stewards, the Forest Service, and land managers for partnership led projects (see Prezi powerpoint). The immediate benefits from this new model include an increase in projects on the ground and a shift in who is leading projects. While this new model has many benefits, it also illustrates a key weakness, namely the single funding source dedicated to the FNST. Diversifying FNST funding for distribution within the model beyond core program dollars for the USFS is key for a sustainable future.

New Partnership Funding Model



A list of major reroutes and infrastructure projects were also listed (see Prezi powerpoint).

Goal 2: Standards – Review and Implementation

Consistency across management boundaries continues to be a challenge for the FNST in terms of trail maintenance, construction, information and public access standards. An FNST Minimum Standards & Guidelines handout was presented to Coalition members as well as a more in-depth addendum which are both now available on-line at www.fs.usda.gov/fnst. These documents should assist land managers and volunteers in maintaining the FNST to the same standard across resource boundaries by Trail Class. Additional materials will be developed including a sign plan, and simple form for re-ordering which will also be made available at the FNST website.

Innovative Partner Actions

The Florida Trail Association has made several key changes to their staff structure and program of work to better meet the needs of the FNST and its greatest resource, the volunteer stewards and public and private land managers of the Trail. The FTA will be hosting a Trail Skills College October 11-12th for interested land managers and volunteers to gain a greater understanding of FNST trail standards and tools and techniques for maintaining trail safely and efficiently. This training will become an annual event that rotates around the state. The FTA has also hired two regional representatives who are responsible for coordinating trail maintenance and stewardship activities on the FNST, as well as act as the primary contact between the volunteers and the land managers of the FNST.

Jeff Glenn, Northern Region from Ocala NF to the Suwannee, Jeffg@floridatrail.org
Alex Stigliano, Southern Region, Big Cypress NP to Ocala NF, Alexs@floridatrail.org

Goal 1: Completion – Gap Analysis

The FNST consists of approximately 1,000 miles of constructed trail and 300 miles of signed road walks or private connectors across 57 independent gaps. In order to update the 2003 Land Acquisition Plan for current conditions, a strategy for engaging partners around developing alternatives is necessary. The Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation has been engaged by the USFS to assist in the development of such a process, focusing their efforts on the 3 largest gaps, which are also reflected as Priority Gap Areas of the 2012 Florida Greenways and Trails Plan.

Innovative Partner Action

Dale Allen, president of the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation, presented the culmination of his efforts in working with land managers and community interests to explore alternatives for Gap areas 1 and 3. Gap 3 exists from the Suwannee River to the Aucilla River, with a corridor for hiking that is not eligible for certification due to motorized use. Two alternatives were examined: one to the north and one to the south of the current route. Recommendations from the foundation include to 1) leave the unofficial trail where it is right now, 2) meet with private landowners to see if corridor can be improved, 3) use the

northern route as an alternate corridor for the FNST should the existing unofficial trail be interrupted. Ultimately the southern route was recommended for routing due to its scenic quality and existing resources. A formal trail location review will be necessary, and ultimately an update to the Comprehensive Plan if this route is chosen.

Gap 1 exists in central Florida, where the Trail currently runs through Deseret Ranch along 419 for 31 miles. Alternatives included A) St. Johns River Eco-Heritage Trail, all planned but nothing on the ground, B) an eastern route with good public land connections requiring only 4 miles of acquisition, C) utilizing the slough through Deseret Ranch as a possible corridor, which could result in a 30 year wait. Recommendations for Gap 1 were not provided as the area is still under study. For more information on these gap areas, visit the presentation on-line at www.fs.usda.gov/fnst .

Goal 4: Promotion – User Surveys

Goal 4 of the strategic plan sets out to ensure that every recreationist on the FNST knows the Trail and how their experience relates to the larger, connected trail experience. The first step to engaging a larger audience on the FNST is to understand our current audience and the effectiveness of our current information systems.

Innovative Partner Actions

Taylor Stein, University of Florida, and students Bin Wan (University of Florida, PhD), Carolyn Huntley (University of Florida, Graduate Research Assistant), Ramesh Paudyal (University of Florida, Graduate Research Assistant) and Angela Colonna (University of Florida, Graduate Research Assistant) presented on user studies of the FNST. For use estimates, all three national forests experienced increases in use from 2011-2012 to 2012-2013, high use sites have greater variation by season, and low use sites have less variation. The FNST sees, on average, 350,000 users per year. The highest ranked reason for trail use is to enjoy scenery, experience nature, and feel close to nature. Multiple use on trails indicates that most interactions are between hiker and biker, but that interaction did not generally negatively affect the experience. Most important pull factors for FNST visitors include: wilderness and undisturbed nature, good environment quality, and chance to see wildlife.

FNST Website

Several updates have been made to the Forest Service Florida National Scenic Trail website at www.fs.usda.gov/FNST to reflect needs identified at the December 2014 Coalition meeting.

2014 Workplan

The 2014 update to the 5-Year Strategic Plan Strategies and Objectives was reviewed. No significant comments were noted. *See Attachment* .

Coalition Member Updates

FL Trail Association – The FTA has hired two new regional representatives in south and central Florida. Megan Donoghue (mdonoghue@floridatrail.org) will be making updates this summer to the reporting system for tracking volunteer hours on-line. To view activities completed on your land management unit or to gain access, please contact her.

University of Florida – The University of Florida is continuing to do annual user counts and surveys on the FNST. If land managers are interested in expanding the survey locations or in tailoring survey questions for their management area needs, please contact Taylor Stein directly at tstein@ufl.edu. 2014 surveys include additional questions regarding shared use trails and user interaction.

Big Cypress – Big Cypress National Preserve is currently updating its Back Country Access Plan, of which the FNST is a part, and closed the comment period as of May 2014. For more information please visit <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=49334> .

FL Forest Service – The Florida Forest Service continues a statewide assessment of the FNST on their properties in 2014, similar to the work of FWC in 2013. There is an active Trail Location Review underway in Little Big Econ State Forest which would eliminate a current road walk.

Office of Greenway and Trails – The final top tier documents were approved at the December FGT Council Meeting. For more information or to view the spreadsheet of priority projects visit http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/FGTS_Plan/default.htm .

St. Marks Wildlife Refuge – FTA and Forest Service crews are currently working to build approach structures to the Spring Creek Boardwalk which is scheduled for replacement in 2014. The property transfer between the USFS and FWS is awaiting final signature with the Forest Service.

Presentations

Megan Eno – Partnerships:

http://prezi.com/vjalrr8r0atr/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

Megan Eno – Trail Standards:

http://prezi.com/4in0s7envzmi/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

Attachment 1

2014 Program of Work

FNST 5 Year Strategic Plan : Year 3

Goal: Complete the Trail: Add 100 new scenic and designated miles of FNST towards completion of a high quality trail.

Strategies – 3-5 years	Objectives	2014 Deliverables (Year 3)	Status / Needs
<p>Define the route of a complete FNST based on current on-the-ground conditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete an inventory of the trail corridor including: scenic, cultural, ecological, and recreation resources ○ Complete a matrix of high priority gap areas, emphasizing scenic values ○ Update FNST Routing Plan ○ Coordinate routing plan with long range planning of other agencies/ partners ○ Engage stakeholders in review of final plan ○ Finalize 2014 Routing Plan ○ Ensure all FNST is formally certified under current agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete trail corridor inventory ○ Assess high priority gap areas ○ Draft updated routing plan ○ Begin replacing Certification Agreements with MOU’s following assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ On-going inventory of resources ○ Partner with OGT/FGTF for update of Routing Plan ○ Needs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Data for trail corridor inventory ○ Land manager priority acquisition areas ○ Commitment from managers for inclusion in long range acquisition and management plans

<p>Prioritize trail segments to fill gaps (ongoing and iterative process)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify critical public and private land holder gaps ○ Agree to criteria for prioritization based on current conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prioritize segments for addition to trail based on updated routing plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status: June 2014 Meeting – prioritization of gaps based on current information
<p>Negotiate easements or formal agreements as options for trail completion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify and systematically contact landowners of important segments ○ Sign certifying MOU's, easements or license agreements where appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete list of trail segments that could be designated/ developed through easements or formal agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status: pending routing plan update
<p>Acquire segments as necessary for trail completion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue acquisition as appropriate ○ Pursue both federal and state acquisition funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify acquisition funding opportunities ○ NEPA for proposed Plum Creek Transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status: Continue focus on Suwannee River for easement acquisition ○ Need: identify properties for LWCF 2016 Proposal
<p>Transfer FNST parcels to best appropriate land management agency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to work on legislation for transfer of parcels ○ Continue to identify (based on routing map) parcels that are more appropriate as non-USFS parcels ○ Work with partners for transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Publish atlas of current FNST parcels ○ Complete transfer with St. Marks NWR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status: St. Marks transfer out for final signature ○ Need: Identify next priority transfer
<p>Enhance partnerships w/ NGOs for protection of trail corridor to protect integrity of scenic, ecological cultural values of the landscape</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify areas that need additional protection or are at risk (seasonal closures, development etc). ○ Identify partners for long term corridor protection ○ Work together to ensure permanent protection and landowners objectives met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Updated routing study will identify key parcels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status: pending routing plan update

Standards: 100% of existing designated FNST meets recreational, informational, and interpretive trail standards within its resource classification category of 1-5.

Strategies – 3-5 years	Objectives	2014 Deliverables	Status / Needs
Build and maintain accurate data base of trail by land owner, tread type and trail class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set up and maintain central GIS database ● GPS current corridor and up-date FNST database ○ Identify information gaps and needs on a regular basis ● Use data to set priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify information needs/gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status: FNST data on-line and smart phone accessible through ArcGIS on-line www.arcgis.com/explorer ○ Need: Coalition review of current data, recommendations
Develop, manage, and evaluate the trail to standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Define standards by Trail Class ○ Train volunteers and land managers in trail development, maintenance and management ● Set priorities for trail and infrastructure projects ● Complete priority projects to standard ○ Continue ongoing maintenance to standards ○ Include management to standards in partnership agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue trail condition/infrastructure assessments ○ 2014 Request for Projects ○ Incorporate trail standards into agreements developed in 2014 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Utilize Volunteer Capacity Study to identify volunteer and land manager training needs ○ 2014 RFP input
Create and produce signs, electronic media, print materials, etc. for visual identity, education, and trail standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Design visual identity and create graphic/ design standards ○ Design and develop trail materials to standards ○ Place and maintain trail signs, interpretive exhibits, way finding etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Northern & Southern Terminus Improvements ○ Sample Kiosks/ Sign development ○ Signage emphasis in 2014 RFP ○ Update to FNST Brochure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Southern Terminus improvement active ○ Brochure update under UF agreement, Coalition review at June 2014 Meeting ○ Need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ FWC Agreement modification to include graphic support for 2014 RFP work

Partnerships: Each of the FNST land managers (~50+) proactively contribute to trail development, maintenance, protection and promotion of their segment as part of a larger whole.

Strategies – 3-5 years	Objectives	2014 Deliverable	Status / Needs
Continue to work with Coalition to refine and agree to current partnership model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to build and strengthen relationship between USFS and all land management agency partners • Develop and refine Coalition membership based on strategic plan priorities and on-the-ground conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 meetings per year with full Coalition engagement; • Review of coalition purpose and operations; • Successfully transition and fill vacancies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ County seat transition from Seminole to Osceola County
Work with land management partners to include FNST standards in their management plans and to ensure better coordination of land management practices on a regular basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop schedule of updates for land management plans around the state ○ Educate partners about the FNST and how their segment connects to a larger statewide resource ○ Align FNST with local, county and statewide resource planning efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to increase to 5 or more plans a year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify plan updates occurring in 2014 in addition to : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ BCNP Backcountry Access ○ DOT Bike/Ped Safety Plan
Complete (and review on a regular basis) customized agreements between USFS and land management partners to define partner participation in FNST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Update and revise partnership agreement format to ensure more practical and realistic document for management and monitoring ○ Define, with partners, including FTA, management plans for respective segments ○ Create customized agreements with land management partners based on individualized partner capacity and trail needs ○ Include mechanisms for better coordination for trail management to ensure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create MOU Certification Agreement Template ○ Sign MOU with FWC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status: MOU Certification Agreement renewal active with FWC and FFS ○ Need: identify 2 new partners for trail assessment and agreement renewal in 2014

<p>Increase volunteer capacity to develop and maintain FNST that is highly coordinated with partnership agreements plans and FNST standards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Define volunteer opportunities, needs, and identify gaps ○ Coordinate volunteer activities from a centralized point based on management plans and agreements ○ Build FTA capacity to recruit, mobilize, and retain trail volunteers throughout the state ○ Build relationships with other trail volunteer groups around the state, with focus on youth groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Statewide Volunteer Capacity Study : Survey Results and Workgroup Findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status: Statewide Volunteer Capacity Study workshop scheduled Dec 12th ○ Need: FNST Coalition review of Workshop outcomes
<p>Manage projects and allocate financial and human resources in a coordinated and systematic effort based on agreements and standards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish system to define and prioritize projects to include full partner/ coalition involvement ○ Allocate resources based on deliberate decisions and priorities ○ Fully utilize partner participation as defined by agreements (above) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ FNST Coalition Review of 2014 RFP's 	

Promotion: 100% of FNST recreationists know they are on the trail, know the significance of the trail, and know how their experience is part of the larger whole.

Strategies – 3-5 years	Objectives	2014 Deliverable	Status / Needs
Official route of the FNST published to help people understand how to access the trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Publish trail route from start to finish (see completion goal) ○ Collaborate with local partners to promote access to the FNST 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increase access to FNST map by updating on-line and paper resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status: Current route of the FSNT available on-line ○ Need: Source of current paper maps available for consumers
Create and define FNST brand, branding standards, and communication protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Naming protocols (i.e. appropriate acronym) ○ Create branding/ graphics standards and communications protocols (how FNST is described) ○ Monitor for consistency ○ Include in all agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Include public relations and communication protocols in new MOU Certification Agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status: New communication protocols available in Public Relations Plan and Prezi/Powerpoint for public presentations ○ Need: Engage FDOT in statewide sign planning and trailhead standards
Create message, maps, materials, and merchandise; distribute through variety of media and to a variety of constituency groups that represent diverse recreational users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Define diverse constituency groups and “gate keepers” ○ Create materials for public consumption – hard copy and electronic ○ Train and engage constituency groups in promotion and outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to update FNST Map App through ArcGIS ○ Create FNST specific app 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Define needs for FNST app (access, reporting, use...) ○ Source for FNST maps and merchandise
Implement public relations campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Define publics and target markets (both current and potential) ○ Define outreach strategies, including four major statewide outdoor/ trail days or events ○ Implement and update 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue distribution of PR plan components through on-line media (Prezi, powerpoint) ○ Create calendar of trail days/major events in 2014 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need: Development of 2014 Trail Days Calendar